

Notes on the endemic species and some additional new birds occurring on Pemba Island, Tanzania

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The island of Pemba, a mere 50 km offshore, is separated from the African mainland by a trough some 800 m deep. The estimates of the date of its separation from the mainland vary from the Miocene to the mid-Pleistocene period. Either way, Pemba has been an isolated oceanic island for a very long time, probably between 4 and 5 million years. This contrasts with Zanzibar which is thought to have been an island for only 10 000 to 100 000 years.

As a result of its long isolation the avifauna of Pemba is unique, with a relatively high degree of endemism, although overall it is rather impoverished, lacking several families and species found on nearby Zanzibar and the Tanzanian mainland.

Pemba is probably best known for its high density of clove plantations, but in addition it supports a number of other exotic plants and spices, an endemic palm *Chrysalidocarpus pembanus* and a small area of indigenous coastal forest.

The avifaunas of both Pemba and Zanzibar have been discussed in detail by Vaughan (1929–30) and by Pakenham (1979) both of whom were resident on Pemba for several years. The purpose of this note is merely to comment on the endemic forms occurring on Pemba, and to up-date the current list of species recorded from the island following our visits there during December 1990, October 1992 and February 1993. It will also complement a more detailed paper on the birds of Zanzibar, Pemba, and Mafia islands (Archer, in prep.).

White-backed Duck *Thalassornis leuconotus*

Vaughan (1929) collected a female of the nominate race on Pemba on 3 August 1928. This specimen is currently in the British Museum collection at Tring. Pakenham (1979), however, did not record the species during his service in the Sultanate (1929–1956), possibly because of the hunting pressure during that period. However, shortly after the 1964 revolution, firearms were confiscated, as a result of which all waterfowl are now showing signs of recovery and an increase in numbers. On 12 October 1992 a group of 15 White-backed Ducks was observed on Mapungwi pond near Kangagani. The birds appeared to be much darker and blacker on the head and body than birds we are familiar with on the mainland; in fact, they reminded us of birds on Madagascar (*T. l. insularis*). While it is possible that this Indian Ocean race is now occurring on Pemba, specimen evidence is required for substantiation. Three birds were still present at Mapungwi pond in February 1993.

Pemba Green Pigeon *Treron pembaensis*

Widespread and locally common over much of Pemba, differing considerably in plumage from both the African Green Pigeon *T. calva* and the Madagascar Green Pigeon *T. australis*. Its dull slate-grey head, neck, breast and underparts contrast strongly against the greyish olive-green wings and upperparts. The bill is pale ivory in colour with a bright red cere, while thighs, legs and feet are bright yellow, and undertail coverts rich chestnut. The most commonly heard call is a soft *tiu*—*kiuriuu* (a 2-s gap between the first and last note), but with little or no harsh, grating notes so typical of the mainland *T. calva*.

Goodwin (1967) noted the remarkable convergence of colouration between this and the São Tomé Green Pigeon *T. sanctithomae*, another island form but separated by the breadth of the African continent. Both these forms appear to have differentiated sufficiently to suggest long periods of continued isolation and, following Goodwin (1967, and in Snow 1978), and Urban *et al.* (1986) we feel it appropriate to treat *pembaensis* as a full species.

Bronze-naped Pigeon *Columba delegorguei*

An adult male and three presumed adult females were observed by ALA on 21 December 1990 feeding in a fruiting *Trema* tree in the Ngezi Forest. While the male showed a normal greyish head and white collar, the three presumed females (identical to one seen the previous day) had dark grey heads merging into greenish-bronze colour at the nape. Soft part colours were noted: eyes dark brown with an orange-brown orbital ring, bill blackish, legs pinkish maroon.

In the race *sharpei* occurring in the Usambara Mountains on the mainland some 110 km to the west, females are distinctly coppery rufous-brown on the head, vastly different from the Pemba birds. Prior to these observations, there have been no records of the species from Pemba, and only one (a female, probably immature) from Zanzibar (19 January 1934: Pakenham 1979).

Efforts to obtain specimens have been unsuccessful since none was seen during return visits to the area in October 1992 and February 1993. While it is possible that these birds may represent a hitherto undescribed race, specimen evidence is essential.

Pemba Scops Owl *Otus pembaensis*

A common and widespread species over much of the island in all areas of woodland, clove plantations, and in trees around villages. Well known to the local people, featuring prominently in their beliefs and witchcraft. Several were heard and observed in the Ngezi Forest during 6–7 October 1992 where calling started each evening at dusk (18:30) with a single bird uttering 4–5 loud hooting calls. Call notes were quite varied with the tempo changing frequently. Duetting was common, and with mating observed one one occasion, it was possible to determine that it is the male that gives the higher note, the female the lower one.

As in several other species of scops owl, one rich orange-tawny individual was seen, while specimens of this morph were also examined from the collection housed in the Zanzibar Museum.

Following Benson (1960), and coupled with the fact that there are several major differences between the calls of the Pemba bird and those of the Madagascar Scops Owl *O. rutilus*, we feel it appropriate to follow Fry *et al.* (1988) in treating *pembaensis* as a full species.

African Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus baeticatus*

Over much of its range in East Africa the African Reed Warbler occurs in moist overgrown thickets and around swamp edges. On Zanzibar and Pemba islands Pakenham (1979) referred to the race *suahelicus* as a fairly common resident in gardens near the shore, mangrove swamps, and small bush-covered islets near the coast. He noted that it was tame in gardens, nesting in hibiscus, croton and oleander bushes, seldom in freshwater habitats.

On 10 October 1992 we were surprised to find several, including a pair singing from the canopy, in a patch of dry forest on Misali Island, a small waterless coral rag island. Recordings were obtained of one individual that sang almost uninterrupted from 06:00–11:00.

While some authorities consider *baeticatus* to be conspecific with the Eurasian Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus*, in the light of the atypical habitat and behaviour of the race *suaelicus*, we feel *baeticatus* should continue to be treated as a distinct species.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

The only cisticola recorded from Pemba is *C. juncidis*, being common in all areas of open grassland. Pakenham (1979) commented on a melano-erythristic form occurring alongside and interbreeding with the normally coloured form. It was of interest, therefore, to confirm that this strange erythristic form still exists on the island when, on 13 October 1992, one of a pair showed indistinct blackish streaking along the upperparts on an overall chestnut-brown body plumage. Its mate had normal *juncidis* plumage, and, although the pair were seldom far apart they gave no indication to which sex either belonged.

Such an unusual variation in plumage is not recorded in any other species of *Cisticola*, and in *juncidis*, nowhere other than on Pemba.

Pemba White-eye *Zosterops vaughani*

Common and widespread throughout Pemba and the smaller off-shore islands in all well timbered habitats. Although there are no *Zosterops* on Zanzibar, *vaughani* differs from *Z. senegalensis anderssoni* of coastal Tanzania and *Z. senegalensis kirki* of Grande Comore in having very prominent black lores, and a very small eye-ring, only visible when seen at close range. The song is typically *Zosterops*, but sufficiently distinct from *senegalensis* to warrant, in our view, retaining *vaughani* as a full species.

Pemba Sunbird *Nectarinia pembae*

Common and widespread throughout Pemba, including in all towns and villages, and on the smaller off-shore islands. While the mainland form *chalcomelas* was considered conspecific with *pembae* by Britton (1980), male and female *pembae* are very distinct from *chalcomelas*, both in size and plumage and in voice. Wing measurements of males range 51.5–53 mm (*pembae*) against 61–63.5 mm (*chalcomelas*) (Clancey & Williams 1957). Male *pembae* are frequently seen giving a loud distinctive and repetitive call note *tslink-tslink-tslink* from bare exposed branches of tall trees and this call is totally unlike any call of *chalcomelas*.

Clancey & Williams (1957) discuss both *pembae* and *chalcomelas* along with the systematics of *N. bifasciata*, suggesting a possible link between *pembae* and *notatus* of Madagascar and the Comores.

The following birds are additions to the Pemba avifauna as recorded by Pakenham (1979).

Yellow-billed Egret *Egretta intermedia*

A single bird flying in company with a Great White Egret *E. alba* near Kangagani, 12 October 1992. This species has become established on Zanzibar since the mid 1970s.

Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

One Ngezi Forest 5 February 1993.

Common Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

A single immature at Kichanje pond on 13 October 1992.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

One on Kichanje pond, 13 October 1992. Also recorded recently from Zanzibar.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

One Kichanje pond 13 October 1992. Also recorded on Zanzibar 5 November 1991.

Ring-necked Dove *Streptopelia capicola*

Two held captive at Kiuyu Kwamade near Ngezi Forest on 5 February 1993. The owner claimed that he had trapped the birds locally, one about two years before.

Mottle-throated Spinetail *Telacanthura ussheri*

Two circling around mango trees at Mpakani village some 5 km NE of Wete on 13 October 1992.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

An immature at Kichanje pond on 13 October 1992.

Violet-backed Starling *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*

Three pairs near Ngezi Forest, 20 December 1990, with a male carrying nesting material. Since then there have been several sightings in the area during October 1992 and February 1993 and a male was seen on Kokota island on 5 October 1992.

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